

## Sexual health services for under 25s

The latest Sexual Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Surrey highlights a need to improve engagement and understanding of sexual health & contraception needs in younger people. Against this backdrop and in discussion with Public Health, Healthwatch Surrey (who has been part of the Surrey Sexual Health Outreach Group since 2019) wanted to amplify the voice of under 25s in relation to sexual health services in Surrey.

### What did we do?



We engaged with **9** colleges through in person visits and an online survey (the 2 colleges we went to in person both have sexual health outreach sessions within the college).

In total, **594** people responded (451 were from one college which does not currently have regular sexual health outreach).

### Key findings

#### Having sexual health outreach in colleges makes a difference

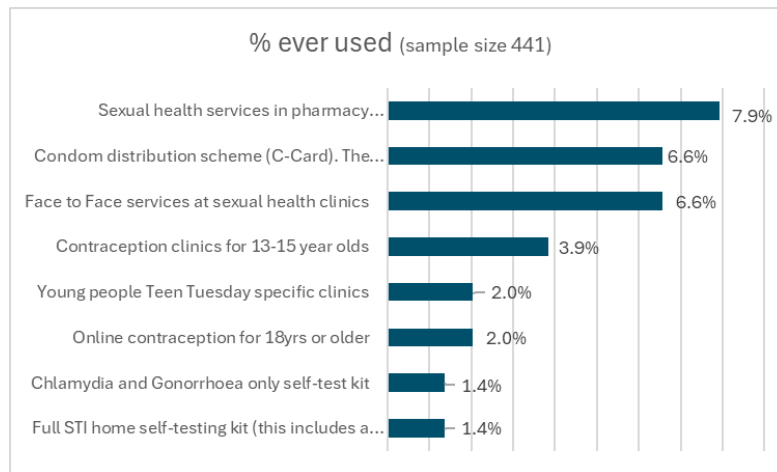
Students are more aware of and use sexual health services if they attend colleges **where there is sexual health outreach sessions.**

**89%** of students from colleges with sexual health outreach sessions knew about services available to them, versus 76% of students from colleges without such sessions.

**36%** of students from colleges with outreach had used services versus 14% of students from colleges without.

Only **11%** of students from colleges without outreach said they would feel **very/fairly comfortable** talking to staff about their sexual health needs, increasing to almost half (**47%**) for students at colleges with outreach.

- **75%** have **heard of** at least 1 of the U25s sexual health services.
- **50%** are aware of contraception available in pharmacies
- **33%** are aware of the full STI home testing kits
- **32%** are aware of the [C-Card scheme](#)
- **30%** are aware of the 13-15yr old contraception clinics
- **25%** are not aware of any sexual health services
- Only **20%** of respondents **had used** any of the services:



Respondents said that sexual health services in pharmacies are the easiest to use, followed by face-to-face sexual health clinics. The C-card scheme was less easy to use.

## How comfortable do students feel about talking to college staff about their sexual health needs?



"It's hard to speak to teachers and members of staff about something that is personal." Another said: "I don't want someone to view me differently for something like that."

Others said:

"I have a good relationship with my tutors. I feel they listen to me and don't judge. They're very supportive."

"Sexual Health advice is very useful and helpful and it's easy to talk to someone if advice is needed."



## How could services be improved?

- **Pharmacies:** people mentioned **staff attitudes, cost** and **locations and times**. "I had to purchase the morning after pill and the attitude towards me buying that felt shameful, which it shouldn't be like that, I didn't appreciate feeling small."
- **C-card scheme:** **more locations** and more **information** about current locations.
- **Face to sexual health clinics:** **appointments** "It is incredibly hard to get an appointment and has to be arranged far in advance which is hard for teens."
- **Full STI home self-testing kit:** "For the ones sent in the post, I remember thinking the packaging isn't very discreet, I would assume this is because of what it contains but can still be awkward walking to the post box with it!"

## Future consideration of services

- A **quarter** said they would consider all of the services we mentioned.
- Reasons for not considering **“teen Tuesday clinics”** included **embarrassment** of seeing someone they might know, wanting a **1-1 session** and feeling **too old** for the service (the majority of our respondents were 17).
- The main reason students don't consider going to **face to face sexual health clinics** was **embarrassment** “I wouldn't be able to go face to face to talk about any issue I'm having sexually out of anxiety and embarrassment.”
- There was also an **embarrassment** element around **pharmacies**.
- There was a **lack of awareness and trust** around the **over 18s online contraception service**. One person said “This is only because I feel that if you are starting contraception that a face-to-face discussion or a phone call should be had with a nurse/ medical professional to make sure the person is aware of the side effects and how to properly use that contraception. It's great that contraception is so accessible, but I think this could mean that the risks or implications aren't fully understood before taking or using a new contraception.”
- The main reason for not considering the **C-card scheme** was that they'd buy their own condoms.
- There is a **nervousness** around the **self-testing kits**, people said they wouldn't trust themselves to do it properly and they'd like a professional to help them.



## Where do students currently get contraception?

- **54%** obtain it from a pharmacy
- **30%** from a GP
- **25%** from a supermarket
- **12%** get it online.
- **5%** said from elsewhere, such as the sexual health clinic, machines in toilets and friends/brothers.



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“It's hard to speak to teachers and members of staff about something that is personal.”



**We received the following response from Surrey County Council’s Public Health team, who commission sexual health services in Surrey.**

Feedback and themes:	Response
<p><b>Pharmacies:</b> people mentioned <b>staff attitudes, cost</b> and <b>locations and times</b>. “I had to purchase the morning after pill and the attitude towards me buying that felt shameful, which it shouldn’t be like that, I didn’t appreciate feeling small.”</p>	<p>Emergency contraception is available for free from participating pharmacies – view pharmacies <a href="#">here</a>. We always recommend calling ahead before visiting to make sure the pharmacist is available to see you.</p>
<p><b>Face to face sexual health clinics: appointments</b> “It is incredibly hard to get an appointment and has to be arranged far in advance which is hard for teens.”</p>	<p>Sexual health clinic appointments can be booked up to two weeks in advance, but are often available within 48 hours, with some appointments being released daily Monday to Friday. Click here to book: <a href="#">Surrey Sexual Health and Contraception   CNWL Sexual Health</a> Services like emergency contraception and 17years and under can walk-in. See website for details. There are Young People’s clinics on Tuesday afternoons at Buryfields, Woking and Earnsdale clinics and under 19s can walk-in to the young people’s clinic on Tuesday afternoons at Buryfields</p>
<p><b>Full STI home self-testing kit:</b> “For the ones sent in the post, I remember thinking the packaging isn’t very discreet, I would assume this is because of what it contains but can still be awkward walking to the post box with it!”</p>	<p>Here are some examples of what the testing kits look like: <a href="#">Free Chlamydia self-testing kits</a> Patients don’t need to walk to the post box with the whole package, all they need to return is the samples which they need to place into the envelope provided. The address on the envelope is the laboratory address and there is no reference to what the envelope contains.</p>
<p>Reasons for not considering <b>“teen Tuesday clinics”</b> included <b>embarrassment</b> of seeing someone they might know, wanting a <b>1-1 session</b> and feeling <b>too old</b> for the service (the majority of our respondents were 17).</p>	<p>The Young Peoples Clinics are on Tuesday afternoons 3pm–6pm for patients up to age 19 years old, providing all sexual health services including PrEP, general contraception and implants. Appointments can generally be booked up to two weeks in advance.</p>

	<p>The Surrey Sexual Health Service have recently changed the name of the 'Teen Tuesday Clinics' to 'Young people clinics'. This is to avoid people feeling too old to use the service. Patients have a 1-1 appointment in every case; there are no clinic "group" sessions. (The only group sessions offered are via our Outreach team but these are non-clinical and not part of Young People's clinics). Young people can attend any clinic, they are not restricted to the Young People's clinics. However, only 19 years and under are permitted into a Young People's clinic. This is to avoid the possibility of seeing a known adult e.g. relative/neighbour etc in the waiting room.</p>
<p>There was a <b>lack of awareness and trust</b> around the <b>over 18s online contraception service</b>. One person said "This is only because I feel that if you are starting contraception that a face-to-face discussion or a phone call should be had with a nurse/ medical professional to make sure the person is aware of the side effects and how to properly use that contraception. It's great that contraception is so accessible, but I think this could mean that the risks or implications aren't fully understood before taking or using a new contraception."</p>	<p>For all Combined methods of contraception, a face-to-face appointment is required for the first prescription. Future prescriptions can then be ordered online.</p> <p>Progesterone only contraception (mini pill) can be prescribed without a face-to-face appointment as this is low risk, however the patient needs to submit an up-to-date blood pressure, weight and height reading before the prescription is released. There is a link on the website giving further information including benefits and side effects.</p> <p>If the patient does not want to order this on-line, they can book a telephone or face-to-face appointment to discuss all contraception methods to help them make an informed decision.</p>
<p>There is a <b>nervousness</b> around the <b>self-testing kits</b>, people said they wouldn't trust themselves to do it</p>	<p>Self-sampling can be just as reliable and accurate as getting tested at a sexual health clinic if done correctly. So, it's important to follow the instructions</p>

properly and they'd like a professional to help them.

carefully. Here is a helpful video about home STI testing: [STI self-sampling kits](#) If patients do not feel confident to do the test at home, they can make an appointment with a Health Care Support Worker who will do the test for them in the clinic and if required, show the patient how to do the home test if this is something they would like to do in the future.

One of our Healthwatch volunteers also talked to a small sample of students at Royal Holloway about mental health services – we found a lack of awareness about what's on offer, which can lead to a perceived stigma around mental health.

Mental health on campus: student awareness of mental health services Volunteer report – July 2025 – Healthwatch Surrey